Department of Justice

2046

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1979

CIV
202-633-2014

The Department of Justice today filed a civil suit to recover more than $4.2 million from the Peoples Temple of California for costs to the U.S. Government for removing the bodies of more than 900 church members from Guyana to the United States last November.

Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said the suit was filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco.

Named as defendants were: The Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ, a California corporation, and three "alter ego" foreign organizations.

The suit says that on November 18, 1978, the Peoples Temple failed to protect from wrongful injury or death more than 900 persons in Jonestown, Guyana. This led to an emergency situation that was a threat to health, safety, and decency, the suit says.

The suit alleges that the church members in Jonestown had either expressed or implied contracts with the defendants for the necessities of life, including a proper burial.

(OVER)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY _____ DATE _____
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE _____
TS AUTH. _____ REASON(S) _____
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED☐ RELEASABLE☐
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS _____

However, the defendants failed to tend to the needs of its members, the suit says, and did not provide for the burial of its members or to protect the dead from indignities.

"The United States requested the government of Guyana to permit burial on its soil which request was denied," the suit said. "The government of Guyana then requested the United States to remove the bodies from Guyana."

For reasons of public health, safety and decency, the United States undertook the body-removal task, the suit argues.

To date the United States has incurred damages of $4,298,000, the suit says.

The suit also asks the court to pay to the government any additional damages that may accrue.

The other defendants in the suit are The Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ in Guyana and Peoples Temple Christian Church Company, Limited, both Guyanese corporations, and Asociacion Religiosa Pro San Pedro, S.A., a Panamanian organization.

####